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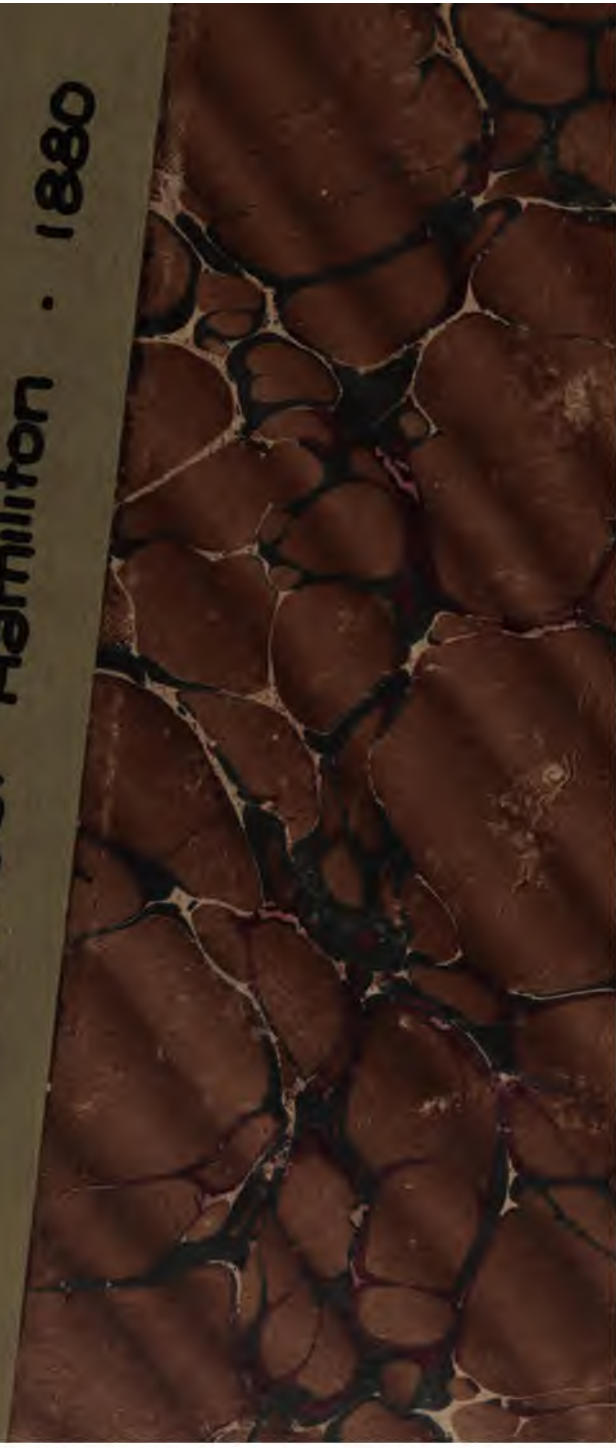
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Unveiling of the Statue

OF

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IN

CENTRAL PARK, NEW YORK,

*NOVEMBER 22, 1880.*

BY

Hon. CHAUNCEY M. DEPEW.

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# ADDRESS

AT THE

## Unveiling of the Statue of Alexander Hamilton,

*IN CENTRAL PARK, NEW YORK, NOVEMBER 22d, 1880,*

BY

Hon. CHAUNCEY M. DEPEW.

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FELLOW CITIZENS:

The cosmopolitan spirit of our city is attested by the monuments erected in this Park by the pride and patriotism of other nationalities and States to commemorate the men whose genius and works belong to them, but are equally honored by us. The time has long since passed, when to this glorious group should have been added the statue of New York's greatest gift to the revolutionary period and the constitutional history of the Republic. The filial piety of a son performs the work, and we are here to honor the deed, and venerate the memory of his distinguished father.

Precocious intellects in all ages of the world have flashed with meteoric splendor, and for a brief space

amazed mankind; but he only whose full equipped mind knew no youth and never failed in the full maturity of its powers was Alexander Hamilton. At twelve years of age, a merchant's clerk, he writes: "I would willingly risk my life, though not my character, to exalt my station." At thirteen he was the responsible head of a great commercial establishment, controlling the details of the counting-room, managing its ventures with distant countries, and maintaining its credit. At fifteen, he stands before the venerable President of Princeton College, with the bold proposition to be permitted to ascend through the classes as he mastered their courses, and to be graduated, without regard to the years allotted by the rules, when he could pass an examination. The conservatism of Princeton rejects, and Columbia, then Kings College, accepts the youthful student upon his own terms. With rare industry and application, with method and wisdom, he seeks every source of knowledge and rapidly absorbs and assimilates all the teachings of the schools.

But while he meditates in the groves of the Academy, the thunders of the mighty revolution which was shaking the continent disturb the quiet of the lecture room. The protracted struggle of the Colonists with the Mother Country for peaceful recognition of their rights was approaching a crisis. The tea had been thrown into Boston Harbor, and the retaliatory measures of the Home Government impressed upon the colonies the necessity of all

uniting in the common defence. A great meeting was called in the Fields by the Patriots of this city. When the orators had closed their passionate appeals, a slender lad of seventeen ascended the platform. Curiosity soon gave place to admiration, and admiration to amazement and enthusiastic applause as the boy proceeded. Calmly and clearly, with resistless reason and vivid imagery, he portrayed the origin of the difficulties, the rights guaranteed by their charters, by Magna Charta and the English Constitution, but above all the inalienable liberties of every people, and showed the possibilities of successful resistance by united effort. New York decided to send delegates to the Continental Congress, and Hamilton began that structure of American Nationality of which he was the main architect, and to whose perfection and perpetuity he devoted his life.

A resort to arms had not yet closed the forum, and into the discussion came the best trained, the ablest, the most eloquent men of New York, pleading the cause of England in pamphlets remarkable for their power, and which stayed the course and shook the judgment of the people. But the replies were so brilliant and overwhelming that they consolidated public sentiment for the cause of the people, and were ascribed to the foremost statesman of the period; and upon the discovery of their author, Hamilton, at eighteen, was hailed by the whole country as the peer of the Adamses and of Jay. But when the multitude, smart

ing under wrongs and fired by the eloquence of their champion, sought riotous vengeance upon their enemies, he stayed the angry mob while the President of his College escaped, and offered to lead in defence of property and the majesty of the law. Popular passion never swayed his judgment ; personal ambition, or the applause of the hour, never moved or deterred him. The same intuitive insight and foresight, which worked out for him his own course and position, recognized and protected the rights of his bitterest foes.

Concord and Lexington closed the argument.

He saw the necessity and rightfulness of armed resistance, and, with clearest reasoning upon the character of the combatants and the nature of the country, predicted its success. While others fought for terms, he from the beginning fought for independence. With the remnant of his little fortune he equipped a company, and the Board of Examining Officers, in admiration of his proficiency in the science of war, commissioned the stripling a Captain of Artillery, and complimented the discipline of his command. In an anonymous letter which he wrote to Washington he pointed out the dangers of the position on Long Island, and the warning was justified by the disastrous battle and retreat. His coolness and intrepidity at Harlem Heights attracted the notice and comment of the Commander-in-Chief, and his skill and bravery at White Plains stayed the onset of the veteran and victorious Hessians. In an age when commissions in the army were only secured

by noble birth or by purchase, he struck the keynote of the inspiration of a volunteer force, by recommending promotion from the ranks with such vigor to Congress, that his advice was adopted. During the gloomy retreat through New Jersey, a veteran officer noticed a company "which was a model of discipline: its Captain a mere boy, with small, slender and delicate frame, who, with cocked hat pulled down over his eyes, and apparently lost in thought, marched beside a cannon patting it every now and then as if it were a favorite horse or pet plaything," and was surprised when told it was the famous Hamilton. But the young officer held the British at bay while the American Army crossed the Raritan, and at Princeton and Trenton his company won renown and left upon the field three-fourths of their number.

From the line, with its opportunities for distinction and promotion, the necessities of the Commander-in-Chief drafted Hamilton into his military family, and at twenty he became the confidential Aid of Washington. How fortunate and providential was this conjunction. The reverence of the Secretary for the majestic character, lofty patriotism and full rounded judgment of his Chief, was reciprocated by the confidence and admiration of the Chief for the genius, thoroughness, readiness, comprehensive knowledge, intuitive perception and purity of his Secretary. The one began, the other instantly grasped the conclusion. The brief statement of the one became the convincing argu-

ment of the other. The suggestive hint of the evening was presented for signature as the completed and unanswerable argument of the morning. Washington pointed the way, and Hamilton cleared and paved the broad road upon which Congress, or the Army, or the hesitating State, must travel. The responsibilities of the Continent, in field and Cabinet, rested upon Washington; but Hamilton grasped, assimilated, codified principles and simplified details, so that in the vast and complicated system nothing was neglected or forgotten, and the friendship cemented and strengthened with years ended only in death. It was a fitting and picturesque close of the Revolutionary War that, when the combinations of Washington had hemmed in Cornwallis at Yorktown, Hamilton should lead the forlorn hope in the storming of the British redoubt, and, firing his soldiers to the charge by the memory of the massacre of their comrades at New London, in the heat and passion of victory grant mercy to the vanquished.

Independence left the Republic with but the shadow of a government. Congress possessed only advisory powers, and in its inability to enforce its decrees upon the States, became an object of contempt at home and ridicule abroad. It was then that Hamilton brought forth his exhaustless resources to consolidate a nation. The first convention proved a failure, but its address to the country, prepared by him, aroused the fears and stirred the patriotism of the people. The second convention, presided over by Wash-

ington, numbered among its members the ablest men of the infant Republic. Hamilton presented for their deliberations a system complete in all its parts. He had seen the war for Independence prolonged, and at times almost lost, by the failure of centralized authority and the jealousies of the States, and he proposed that the great empire, whose future was as clear to his vision as its reality is to ours, should recognize the federative principle in home and local affairs, but be clothed with powers to preserve the union of the States and command the respect of the world. State sovereignty assailed the proposition in every part, but out of the discussion was saved the Constitution which has survived the storms of a century. Its preamble, written by him, "We, the People of the United States," was the foundation of his policy. An overwhelming majority of the New York Convention, led by her War Governor, George Clinton, opposed its ratification, but Hamilton, by resistless logic, impassioned eloquence, and lofty appeals to the pride and patriotism of its members, silenced opposition, quieted prejudices, and won the assent of our State to the great compact; and, with rapturous applause, with processions and addresses, the people, whom he had educated by the *Federalist*, the Press and his speeches, to a desire for a common country, hailed him as the Savior of the Nation. Hamilton forged the links and welded the chain which binds the Union. He saw the dangers of Secession, and pointed out the remedy against it



in the implied powers of the Constitution. When Pennsylvania rebelled against the Excise Law, he said, "Let there be no temporizing, but crush the insurrection with such overwhelming force and display of power that it will never be repeated." Upon the foundation laid by Hamilton, Webster built his majestic structure of Constitutional Law, and the principles so established silenced nullification, vindicated the right of the Republic to protect its life by arms, and reconstructed the States.

This young soldier, whose life had passed in camps, dropped the practice of law, at the moment when eminence and wealth were in his grasp, to obey the call of Washington, and at thirty-two became the first Secretary of the Treasury. The Republic was bankrupt and without credit, commerce was destroyed, trade paralyzed, agriculture neglected, and public distress and private poverty were the attendants of despair. He so constructed the Treasury Department that it has needed but little revision during ninety years. He created a system of finance which restored credit and sent the life-blood throbbing through every artery of the body politic. The demagogue cried, "pay the obligation of the Government at the nominal price for which it was buffeted in the market," and the misery of the unthinking echoed the cry; but this statesman said "Let the letter and the spirit of the bond be met," and prosperity trod upon the heels of honesty. He alone knew the secrets whose publicity enriched multitudes, and yet

he retired from office to earn a living. Upon the boundless sea of experiment without chart or compass, he invented both. He smote the sources of revenue with such skill and power, that from the barren rocks flowed the streams which filled the Treasury and the Sinking Fund, and the exhausted land was fertilized by its own productiveness.

Out of chaos he developed perfected schemes which have stood every strain and met every emergency in our national life. From his tent at Morristown he suggested to the bewildered Morris, who was seeking funds to sustain the Revolution, a plan of a National Banking system which he completed as Secretary of Treasury, and which, after many vicissitudes and with some modifications, has met the exigencies created by civil war, and is the basis upon which rests our whole structure of public and private business. He saw the necessity for manufactures, and the possibility of their creation and growth by judicious protection, and laid down the principles which succeeding statesmen and publicists have accepted, but never enlarged. When the orgies of the French Revolution maddened Europe and intoxicated America, and in the name of universal Republicanism France demanded an offensive and defensive alliance, he stemmed the popular current, prophesied that license would end in despotism, and established that great rule of neutrality which has

been the guiding and protecting spirit of our foreign policy.

Having spent his patrimony in the war, the care of his family called for his best exertions. So great was the concentration of his industry and the comprehensiveness of his mind, that in three months he mastered the law, and entered at once upon a lucrative practice. So great was his public spirit that he abandoned it to perfect the Federal Constitution, resumed, and again left it to secure the ratification of that instrument, closed his books a third time when summoned by Washington into his Cabinet, and locked his office for a fourth time to organize an army to resist threatened war and invasion of the country.

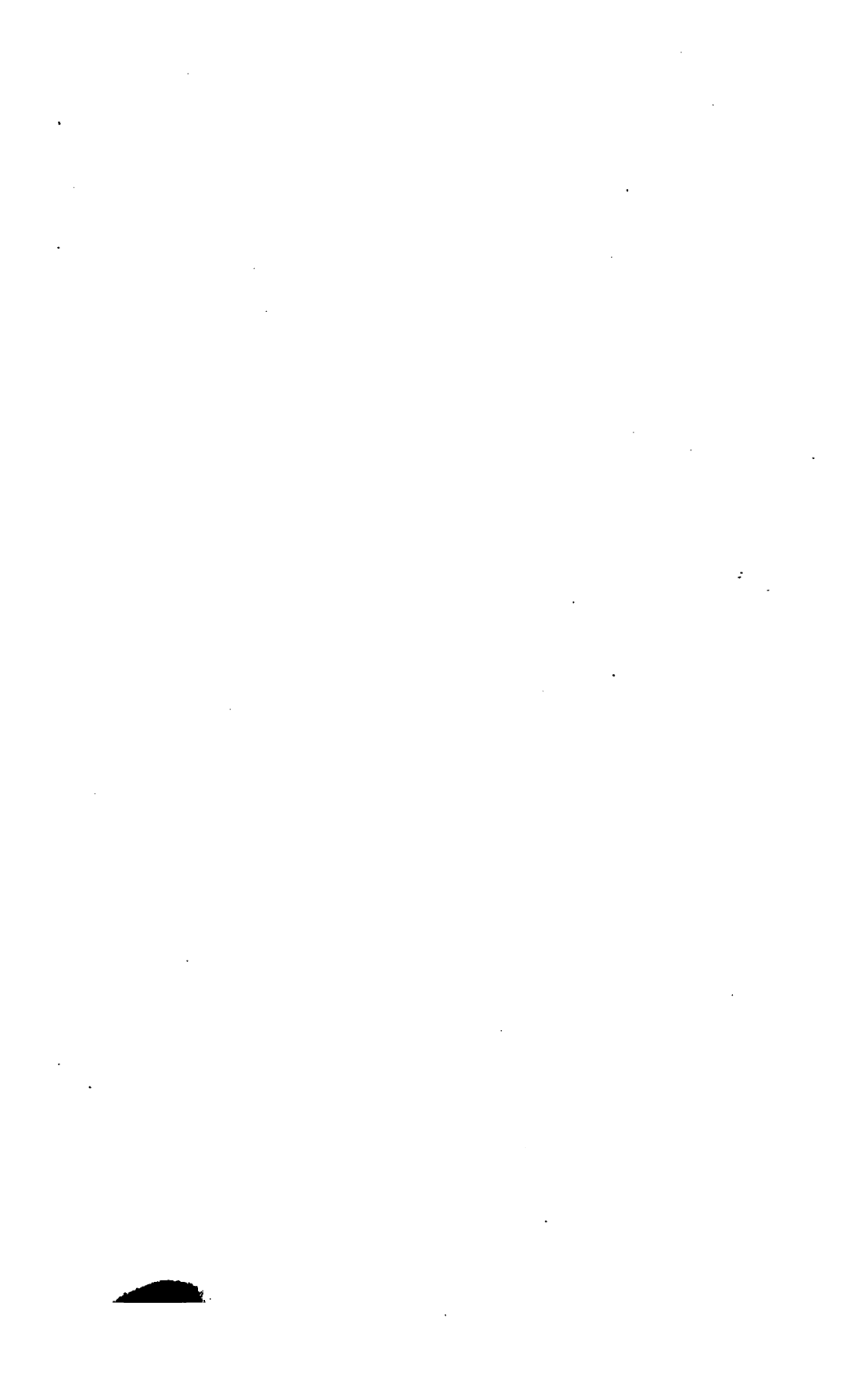
Amidst the universal prosperity created by his wisdom and measures, private needs compelled his resignation, and he entered upon the brief, but most brilliant, professional career in the illustrious history of the bar of our State. With all-embracing genius, the most plodding lawyer was never better fortified with case and precedent. With tireless energy he traced principles back to their sources and forward to their conclusions. Enraptured juries were swayed by his eloquence, and admiring judges convinced by his arguments. He so settled the law of libel and the liberty of the press, that his brief became part of the Constitution of States and the statutes of England. The accused, who was too poor to retain and too humble to arouse the

ambition of a lawyer, found both advocate and acquittal in Hamilton. The needy client, whose little patrimony and family he had saved, could pay no fee but grateful tears. That he was human and committed errors is the background which brings out in bolder relief the simplicity and integrity of his character and the greatness of his mind. Talleyrand, walking up Garden street in this city late at night, and seeing him at work in his office, said: "I have seen one of the wonders of the world. I have seen a man laboring all night to support his family who has made the fortune of a nation." This great critic and cynic said: "I consider Napoleon, Fox and Hamilton the three greatest men of our epoch, and without hesitation I award the first place to Hamilton." To the objection that the others had dealt with greater masses and larger interests in Europe, Talleyrand replied: "But Hamilton divined Europe."

The period was rich in precocious intellects, but Hamilton's superiority was in strength of thought and vigor of expression, in the consistency and honesty of his convictions, the unselfishness of his purposes, and his marvellous versatility. He brushed aside prejudice and preconceived opinions, and from impregnable foundations his reasonings had the strength of inspiration and the spirit of prophecy. He dwelt upon the problem of internal commerce, and suggested the Erie Canal. He thought out a standing army, and founded West Point. He saw the necessity of

popular education and the plain duty of the State, and perfected that grand and comprehensive system, free from sectarian control or influence, which is the pride of New York, and has been a model of reform in foreign countries. The glory of our time is the emancipation of the slave, and yet he advised the arming and freeing of the blacks in the revolutionary war as a measure of wisdom and philanthropy. When informed of the death of Washington, he burst into tears and fell into the arms of a friend, crying, "The Republic has lost its Saviour and I a Father." His last message was, "For God's sake cease conversations and threatenings about a separation of the Union." His dying words were of forgiveness to his murderer and his enemies, and of a confident trust in salvation through the mercy of the Redeemer. The Republic, recovering from grief at the loss of Washington by the reflection that Hamilton lived in the meridian of his powers, was plunged into universal sorrow by his untimely end. But the fears which agitated that generation, lest the dissolution of the Union might follow the death of this great bulwark of nationality, have blended, in our time, into reverence and gratitude for the founder of the Constitution.



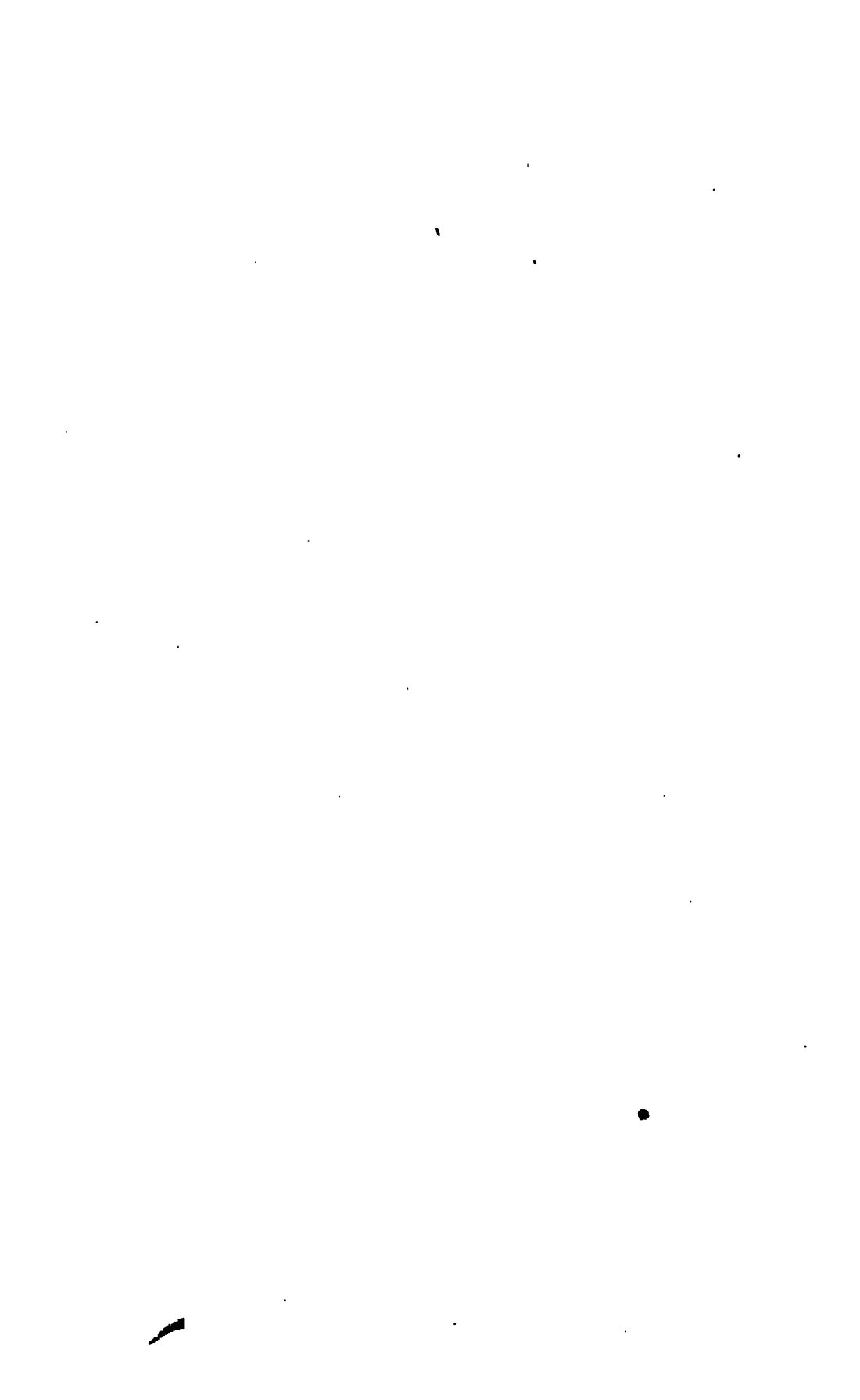












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